

Enjoying coffee and a pastry with his wife while seated on the breezeway of Fig Garden Village, Kingsburg City Councilmember Dave Karstetter began thinking. He imagined such an ambiance could be replicated along Marion Street in Kingsburg. It would make perfect sense. The City's Swedish Village theme along Draper Street is inviting for strolls, casual shopping and dining. Marion Street runs adjacent to Draper, is the gateway connecting Draper with Highway 99 and has more land available now for sale than in any other time in recent history.

Councilman Karstetter began working on a plan that would make his dream a reality. "When I first started talking about Marion Street as *Fig Garden-esque* people were ready to shoot down the idea because they were imagining shops like Patrick James and Ann Taylor. I wasn't thinking of the shops. I was thinking of the look and feel of Fig Garden Village." Karstetter said. "If you have shaded trees, wide sidewalks, expanded awnings over buildings, gift shops, restaurants and entertainment venues, Kingsburg will be known as the South County's destination city to spend a nice relaxing day. That's where I think we can really carve a niche for ourselves. Our research shows that Valley people already have a positive image of Kingsburg. We score high on the cleanliness and safety scales, so there really isn't anything negative that we have to overcome."

City of Kingsburg Planning Director Terry Schmal along with Karstetter have begun the planning process. According to Schmal, "We think Marion Street will become very interesting for developers as Fresno becomes saturated and attention is shifted toward all of the available land in the South County. Many small cities attempt to provide just maintenance for their downtown district. What the Marion Street project will do is actually expand our downtown. We're excited at being one of the few Valley cities to embrace their downtown by expanding on its personality and style."

The planning process, however, takes time to complete. As one might guess, many landowners, government officials and entities must all have an opportunity to weigh in on the final outcome. Look for future communication from the City on the project's status but in the meantime the owners of Marion Street property extending from Smith Street to Sierra Street have been sent a letter asking that if they sell their property or lease it to new leasees going forward that they consider putting businesses in those locations versus residences. According to Schmal, "We don't want to remove anyone from their place of residence, but that stretch of property is zoned for central commercial. As renters move out, we're hoping that the property owners will consider more of the Draper Street type of businesses to move in."

One thing is certain. Kingsburg's Marion Street is about to get a facelift. The gateway to the downtown district will be exciting to watch as it transforms into an ambiance of *Fig Garden-esque* proportions.